

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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| Project Name: | Temporary Laydown Area Outside of Right-of-Way |
| Proposed Implementation Date: | Summer/Fall of 2023 |
| Proponent: | Northwestern Energy |
| Location: | ALL of Section 11, Township 7 South, Range 19 East (Pine Hills School Trust) |
| County: | Carbon County |

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent, Northwestern Energy, is applying for a Land Use License adjacent to their existing Right-of-Way (Deed #1384 granted in 1926) for the purpose of pole laydown and framing and helicopter attachment to carry poles to installation locations along their easement route. The area affected will be approximately 50' x 800' adjacent to their right-of-way. They will be utilizing an existing two-track to access the site on Section 11, Township 7 South, Range 19 East, encumbering approximately 1.6-acres of State Trust Land. This section of State Land is in the middle of what is known as the Palisades Block. The proposed project will take approximately two (2) weeks to complete.

Northwestern Energy has developed and is in the construction phase of a project for complete pole replacement along this powerline route in Carbon County. The powerline runs through remote and topographically difficult terrain. Northwestern Energy is proposing to use an area in and adjacent to their right-of-way on State Land in a dry, flat area in order to frame poles and have a helicopter lift them to the pole replacement locations. The helicopter will land intermittently while securing the poles. Fueling and storing will be completed off site.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. Northwestern Energy has obtained a Settlement of Damages form from the grazing lessee.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

No other government permits are needed affecting this section of State Trust Land.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Issue the Land Use License to Northwestern Energy to utilize a portion of state land adjacent to their right-of-way and allow road access on Section 11, T7S, R19E in the Palisades Block in Carbon County to allow pole lay down and framing and helicopter attachment for pole replacement.

No Action Alternative Deny the Land Use License to Northwestern Energy to utilize a portion of state land adjacent to their right-of-way on Section 11, T7S, R19E in the Palisades Block in Carbon County to allow pole lay down and framing and helicopter attachment for pole replacement. Northwestern Energy will pause construction and find a new construction site.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The structural geology within the landscape surrounding the project area is a result of uplifting, tilting and depressing large crustal blocks of Precambrian crystalline rocks known today as the Beartooth Mountains. These surficial deposits vary in thickness from 10 to 30 feet and are a result of various glacial and erosion processes transporting bedrock material relatively short distances from the uplifted crustal blocks to low angle slopes along the mountain front.

Soils in the project area generally have a clay loam surface texture but grade to a sandier clay loam along ridges and convex features. Deep soils with elevated clay contents, particularly on north aspects, typically remain moist well into summer months.

The proposed action involves utilizing an area adjacent to a granted powerline right-of-way and will be used for approximately two weeks. An existing two-track will be utilized to access the site. There may be short term compaction from equipment and use. The proposed action will have no significant long-term adverse impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed alternative does not cross or impact any surface water, nor is there any immediate surface water source in the area of the proposed activity. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated by implementing the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

There may be short-term isolated impacts in the form of airborne particulate emission from construction equipment and helicopter usage during the construction and installation of poles. The project is anticipated to take approximately two weeks. Due to the relatively short duration of the project, and remote location of said project, no significant adverse impacts are anticipated implementing the proposed action.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

State ownership is in the central portion of the Palisades Landscape and contains a mix of forested and non-forested vegetation types. The land classification is considered a mix of Rocky Mountain Lodgepole Pine Forest (24%), Aspen Forest and Woodland (19%), Big Sagebrush Steppe (14%) and Rocky Mountain Montana Douglas-fire Forest and woodland. The remainder portion is a combination of montane meadows, foothill and valley grasslands, and riparian areas.

The proposed action will allow Northwestern to temporarily utilize a portion of State Land adjacent to their right-of-way in a flat, open-area for approximately 2 weeks. No significant long-term adverse impacts to vegetative cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A variety of big game (moose, grizzly bear, black bear, elk, antelope, and deer), small mammals, raptors, songbirds and turkeys may traverse the subject sections.

The proposed action will allow Northwestern to temporarily utilize a portion of State Land adjacent to their right-of-way for approximately 2 weeks. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns during the use period and operation. The proponent will rehab any disturbance in the area utilized by equipment.

No significant or long-term adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative, but it is noted that there are two terrestrial species documented in the area that are federally classified as threatened – the Canada Lynx and Grizzly Bear. There is concern that activities proposed in this project may adversely affect federally listed threatened and endangered species, and/or sensitive species.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following species of concern in the proposed sections:

- **Long-eared Myotis** (*Myotis evotis*), **Hoary Bat** (*Lasiurus cinereus*), **Grizzly Bear** (*Ursus arctos*), **Little Brown Myotis** (*Myotis lucifugus*), **Wolverine** (*Gulo gulo*), **Spotted Bat** (*Euderma maculatum*), **Canada Lynx** (*Lynx canadensis*),
- **Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*), **Clark's Nutcracker** (*Nucifraga columbiana*), **Evening Grosbeak** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), **Great Gray Owl** (*Strix nebulosa*), **Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos*), **Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*), **Sagebrush Sparrow** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*)

Along with the species listed, Bat Roosts (Non-cave) have been discovered in the area. There are also potential species of concern that have the possibility of having habitats or being observed in the surrounding area.

There are two terrestrial species documented in the area that are federally classified as threatened – the Canada lynx and grizzly bear.

The proposed action will allow Northwestern to temporarily utilize a portion of State Land adjacent to their right-of-way for approximately 2 weeks. Due to the nature of the proposed alternative, there is not expected to be a significant long-term effect on any of the species identified on or around these parcels.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The following cultural and paleontological surveys have been previously performed:

- 2013 – Project # 2013-5-2 – None Identified

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or

paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, and the majority has been inventoried to Class III standards. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed reciprocal access project.

The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. Formal reports of findings are available through the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed action will allow the proponent to utilize an area of State Land adjacent to their granted right-of-way. The project activities will take approximately two (2) weeks to complete and consist of approximately 7 vehicles and a helicopter for the construction and replacement of the power line poles.

The proponent will rehab all disturbed areas and has agreed to additional weed monitoring to prevent spread of noxious weeds. Once the project is completed and the area rehabbed, there will be minimal evidence of disturbance outside their powerline easement corridor.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There is potential for future timber harvests on the Palisades block of State-owned land, which this section falls within. There are no other known studies or future actions planned for this Trust land parcel. If a future timber harvest was proposed, it would be analyzed under its own environmental review.

| IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES</i> potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• Explain <i>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS</i> following each resource heading.• Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present. |

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

A small crew will be in the local area during the project timeframe. The proposed action will have no significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will have no adverse impact on tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This section of State Land is legally accessible through adjacent Forest Service Land on the far west end of the Palisades Block. The small area adjacent to the proponent's right-of-way may be restricted during operation for safety. The proposed action will have a minor temporary impact on the access to and quality of recreational use.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no known native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The Pine Hills School Trust will benefit by receiving a one-time payment of \$1,500.00 for the period of use. Any future use will need proper authorization, with compensation at that time.

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| EA Checklist Prepared By: | Name: Joe Holzwarth | Date: 19 July 2023 |
| | Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office | |

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that the Land Use License be issued to Northwestern Energy on Section 11, Township 7 South, Range 19 East in Carbon County. The Land Use license will allow for Northwestern Energy to utilize an existing two track and allow them to occupy a 50' x 800' area adjacent to their right-of-way. The impacted area will be approximately 1.6-acres. The proposed project timeframe will be approximately two (2) weeks.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which entails allowing the proponent to utilize a 50' x 800' for pole laydown and framing and helicopter attachment area to carry poles to the installation locations along the granted easement route. Due to the short timeframe of approximately two (2) weeks, the impacts are expected to be minimal. The proponent will rehab the area upon completion and has agreed to additional weed monitoring and management in the disturbed area. There are no natural features that are expected to be impacted and produce significant adverse impacts if the proposed action is implemented.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis


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| EA Checklist Approved By: | Name: Jeff Bollman, AICP |
| | Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office |
| Signature:  | Date: 7/25/2023 |

Exhibit 'A' – Approximate Location of Use Area

